

Not Just a Team

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by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

When asked “Who is the most brilliant in Season 1?”, almost everyone would answer “Ye Qiu”.

If you have asked the Excellent Era from back then, however, they would answer “Not just the most brilliant. He is the most amazing guy I knew.”

And if you have asked Ye Xiu, he would answer warmly, "Team Excellent Era."

Because to him, his teammates from Excellent Era were all the best people he had ever known.

When Season 1 started, it still hadn't been that long since Su Muqiu died. The season was also the start of a very new job and competition for which Ye Xiu was saddled with the team responsibilities and expectations of.

Ye Xiu hadn't minded the latter and worked really hard to come up with training plans, tactics, and countless other things. But he often overworked and overstressed, and this, piled with the insomnia gained from the former thing that had happened, caused him to be very absent-minded at times. And tired. Among other not very good combinations of things.

"Ah." Yin Xiong said when he looked up from his computer to see Ye Xiu walking in with a bunch of papers. He stood up, but Qin Tianran was already ahead of him and at Ye Xiu's side.

"Group hug!" Qin Tianran shouted happily, glomping the little captain just as he accidentally tripped and nearly sent the papers flying. Ye Xiu made an embarrassed noise of protest as his teammate's arms wrapped around him, but Wu Xuefeng didn't let him escape. The vice captain gave a chuckle as he stabilized the papers and hugged the captain too.

Neither of them mentioned a thing of how their young captain had almost tripped, acting like the only reason why they were holding him was because they wanted to hug him.

"Yin Xiong! What are you doing? Come here!" Qin Tianran laughed and Yin Xiong sighed, but fondly went. "And Xia Ming too, if you want." Qin Tianran said a little embarrassedly because she was a girl.

Xia Ming huffed, but joined them and they had a little group hug. In the middle of them and surrounded by all four sides, Ye Xiu was absolutely embarrassed and couldn't escape. After a while, he flailed, "Can you let go now? We have lots of work to do!"

Unfortunately, they couldn't deny that. There was a lot of things that were needed to be done to establish the team and make it successful. They wanted to tell their little captain to rest more, to do a little less work, but it was true that he was the best at Glory, at researching teams and strategies and making the best plans for a team that even had one *less* member than the minimum to win. None of them were good at that and could replace him.

So they did their best with what they were assigned and watched carefully over him. And gave him hugs.

"Why do you all like hugging so much?" Ye Xiu asked bewilderedly in embarrassment. "I thought you weren't a touchy person too, Yin Xiong."

Ah, their captain. So tired that he didn't even notice that his feet were unstable and he was about to trip and fall.

But they will let him keep the illusion of being strong and everything being alright as he wanted it to appear before them as their little captain who was in charge of almost everything. It was the least they could do for him. That and watch over him every step of the way.

"Sorry, captain." Yin Xiong gave a bashful smile, rubbing the back of his head. "It's just that you're so... huggable."

Ye Xiu gave him an even more bewildered look like he couldn't believe that even came out of Yin Xiong's mouth.

But it wouldn't stop Excellent Era from giving him hugs.

Ye Xiu sighed as he sat on the bed. The temporary dorms in Excellent Era had big rooms. Well, big compared to the room that Su Mucheng once had in their former one bedroom apartment. Big when considering how there was no one by his side hogging all the blankets and sometimes even grabbing him and holding him firmly against his chest.

Ye Xiu covered his eyes with an arm as he fell onto the bed. He knew he wouldn't be able to sleep even if he fell onto the bed and closed his eyes and even covered them. There were too many thoughts, too many memories, too many dreams that would jolt him awake. He missed...

He had been lonely for only one second before suddenly Qin Tianran burst into his room excitedly with a DVD in hand. He jumped.

"Captain! Look what I found! Let's watch it! I already called up the others!"

"They're going to kill you." Ye Xiu said flatly, feeling almost like he will too. That scared him. And wasn't it 11 pm? Shouldn't all of them be getting ready for bed now if they weren't already in it?

"No, they won't!" Qin Tianran happily declared.

"I'm not too sure of that." Xia Ming said with a scowl instead. Her eyes were dark with a glare. She gazed at the two of them though, lingered a little on him, and huffed, "Just one movie." Ye Xiu wondered why her gaze had lingered on him longer. It was Qin Tianran who wanted to watch the movie.

Before he could mention that, Wu Xuefeng passed by their door with a bunch of warm blankets and pillows in his arms. Ye Xiu asked bewilderedly,

"What are you doing?"

"Getting blankets and pillows, of course." Wu Xuefeng answered, "It's cold out. If we're going to be watching a movie together, we should have blankets and pillows. Don't worry. They're very warm and comfy."

Ye Xiu wasn't worried. He was confused by how Wu Xuefeng already seemed so overly prepared. And was taking Qin Tianran's whim seriously. Xia Ming too, for that matter. He thought those two would be serious about their sleep and want to go to bed instead of whatever Qin Tianran wanted.

They walked out though and Ye Xiu supposed he should follow so he did. Qin Tianran cheered, even pushing him to walk faster,

"Team bonding!"

Yin Xiong was already at the only room in the building with a TV and he set up the long couches so that they were facing each other, making a mini bed. Wu Xuefeng placed a blanket on the bottom and they all crowded together on the top on that one mini bed that was really smaller than his current bed.

Xia Ming was someone he had once thought liked her personal space, but she was also there with the others on the makeshift couch bed. She patted a spot in front of her. Ye Xiu stared, but his team also and so he went and sat there.

It was warm, Ye Xiu thought as Qin Tianran set up the TV and he closed his eyes as he waited. The feeling of being surrounded by warm bodies even if they weren't really touching each other. The feeling of someone there at night by his side. The feeling of being watched over as his mother had when he was little, as Muqiu sometimes did when he thought he was asleep...

His eyes drooped and he dropped. Xia Ming caught him as the one behind him and Team Excellent Era exchanged little looks of amusement and achievement.

They knew Ye Xiu had a hard time sleeping, not just because he tended to work late into the night. It was also other things. Understandable things. Ye Xiu sometimes sat by Su Mucheng's side until she fell asleep, promising quietly that he wouldn't leave before she woke up, quietly talking about good memories of Su Muqiu, quietly telling peaceful, happy stories that would help her fall asleep with good dreams.

Xia Ming did as well and Ye Xiu thanked her for it.

But who was there for Ye Xiu?

Who comforted him, told him stories, helped him find rest and peace and good dreams?

Who was there by his side to make sure that he was alright?

They were. They wanted to be there. Not just because he was their captain, not just because he needed it to work well, not just because he was good to them, but because he was a good kid who needed it.

He had just lost a friend he had lived with for three years. Even slept together in the same bed, according to Su Mucheng.

He wanted to seem okay, he acted like he was okay, it was even hard to tell that he was *not* okay, but how could anyone be okay after that had happened?

If it wasn't that the work and responsibilities he took up were that expected for a captain, tactician, and only one who really knew what they were doing in this new industry, they

would have thought that he was just trying to distract himself from his grieving thoughts with busyness. It might be both. Probably was both.

But the heart of the matter was this.

They couldn't watch their captain suffer alone. Most of it was unconscious, their little captain not aware that he was falling a little apart, but they could see it and they wanted to help him.

"So no movie?" Qin Tianran asked, his voice much more quiet than before. His eyes flickered to each of his teammates after he patted the sleeping captain on the head. Out like a light. To fall asleep this quickly, he must have not gotten sleep for days. Or overworked himself. Again. Such a troublesome little captain, he thought softly, brushing his hair.

Xia Ming scoffed as she accepted the blanket and pillow Wu Xuefeng gave to her. The motherly vice captain wrapped one on Ye Xiu as well, even tucking their little captain in. The sight made all of them reflexively snicker.

"No movie." She affirmed, lowering her voice as well and also ruffling the little captain's soft hair. His head laid on her lap. She was going to have numb legs tomorrow, but she didn't mind. Her hand accidentally brushed against Qin Tianran's as they combed his messy hair with their fingers, but she also didn't mind, quietly happy that their captain was finally at rest, comfortable in their presence.

"It's been so long since I had a sleepover." Yin Xiong said as he took a neck pillow. It was the same for all of them. They were independent young adults, but none of them made a move to leave the crowded makeshift bed. They slept.

To an outsider, they would look like a family.

First to go to sleep, but still last to wake up because of fatigue, Ye Xiu woke up to hear a ruckus as Qin Tianran complained to a sheepish Yin Xiong about how he had apparently been kicked out of bed last night and Xia Ming comforted a pouting, jealous Su Mucheng who had saw them and asked why she wasn't invited. Ye Xiu couldn't help but be pleasantly surprised that he actually fell asleep so deeply last night, stunned and warm that they had apparently slept together in an inadvertent sleepover.

They were strangers, friends from online, but he felt that they were much more. Not just a team, but a family.

"Muqiu, where's the-?" Ye Xiu began, stopping when he realized that the person wouldn't be besides him anymore.

He didn't have time to think about it however because Wu Xuefeng was already by his side, handing him a notebook. The strategy notes that he was thinking of for the next match.

"This one, right?" Wu Xuefeng said simply, not mentioning anything else, and Ye Xiu nodded dumbfoundedly, coughed, and began reading them. His heart skipped.

"Ah, let me peel them for you-" Ye Xiu began when he saw that Su Mucheng wanted to eat shrimp. He paused when he heard Su Muqiu's voice in his ear, felt his phantom pout that shrimp peeling for Su Mucheng used to be his job and it was not fair that Ye Xiu was good at this too. His throat strained, but he felt a hand push his head down from behind.

Qin Tianran laughed with a grin as he gave his little captain's head a ruffle.

"Captain! That's not fair! You have to peel shrimp for us too!"

"Ha? Why do I have to do that?" Ye Xiu retorted, his throat loosening again.

"Because you're the best! Bless our shrimp with your little hands too!"

Ye Xiu felt a bit flustered. He had trouble figuring out what to comment on and settled on "My hands aren't little!"

"Yes, yes, they're big enough to peel shrimp for everyone, aren't they?"

"You- I'm your captain!"

"So take responsibility for us and peel shrimp!"

The two bickered, Su Mucheng laughed, and Xia Ming shook her head with a smile. Wu Xuefeng offered to peel shrimp for Su Mucheng, but Ye Xiu reclaimed the task and all of Excellent Era were amazed by his shrimp peeling skills when he cleanly peeled a shrimp within three seconds with just a pair of chopsticks, not even needing to touch any part of it with his hands.

In the end, he was recruited into peeling shrimp for them all, but it wasn't a bad thing. Instead, Ye Xiu felt himself smile with theirs, their awe and liveliness a dazzling thing to him that filled him with warmth and life.

The coldness temporarily vanished again.

Qin Tianran huffed when he finally found their little captain. He wondered if he should pretend he didn't see anything and head back in, but he had already opened the door and saw it, so he closed the door behind him and leaned against the wall next to his crouching little captain. Smoke, a bitter acrid smell that he didn't think he would ever like no matter how many internet cafés he went to in his life, filled his nostrils, but this time he didn't mind.

A part of him ached for his captain, but he forced his more playful self to appear instead and he exasperatedly laughed at his captain who was crying and coughing from the cigarette in his hand.

"You shouldn't smoke if you can't smoke." Ye Xiu was quick at learning things. Qin Tianran had no doubt that he would be quick to pick up the secrets of smoking, probably already had,

but had wanted to smoke badly this time and cry. Qin Tianran really couldn't look at him. He had too many tears for it to just be because of a bad inhalation of smoke.

"Shut up." Ye Xiu mumbled, probably wishing him to go away.

"It's bad for you."

"Then go away." He definitely wanted him to leave him alone.

Qin Tianran stayed by his side though.

Quietly accompanied and listened to a kid cough and cry with eyes filled with tears and cigarette.

The next time, Qin Tianran saw Ye Xiu smoke, the boy had the act down to an art, but he still stayed and accompanied him. He may be able to become a master at smoking casually, more elegantly than chain smokers on TV, but his figure still looked so lonely.

"I thought you don't like the smell." Ye Xiu said quietly after exhaling a puff and watching the fumes rise upwards in the air. Qin Tianran wondered if he sometimes saw his friend in the sky, thought of him in the stars.

"I just wanted to look at the city too. Sometimes, it's nice to relax and take a look outside." Ye Xiu always chose the back alley where no one could find him. There was nothing to look at but darkness and the sky, but he didn't mention it. Neither did he tell him to leave.

They quietly stood against a wall in the dark alley, huddled in coats and looking at the wisps of smoke rise to the sky. The darkness felt a little warmer.

Ye Xiu blinked when Xia Ming abruptly took the container in his hand and replaced it with another. She normally asked before she wanted a dish or condiment on the table. He glanced down at his hand and flushed a little when he realized that he had almost added chili oil instead of soy sauce to his meal. He didn't eat spice. The chili oil and soy sauce container also didn't look anything remotely alike.

No one commented. As if nothing had happened, they continued their conversation about their favorite games at the arcade.

It happened a few more times throughout the season. Sometimes, Ye Xiu would almost add too much salt, but one of his teammates would ask for the shaker even if they already added salt to their meals before him. Sometimes, they would see a third cup of instant noodles that was accidentally made and being stared at on the table. They would casually go up and eat it, thanking him for the meal, and if it was Qin Tianran who saw it, he would even cheerily ask the little captain how he knew that he was so hungry.

Sometimes, the mistakes appeared in the game. A small lapse in concentration, a natural absent-mindedness caused from fatigue and stress, a casual expectation in the game for someone to appear at his side as he once always did.

Wu Xuefeng was good at spotting those. Probably no one outside of them would know that the mistakes Ye Xiu made in the game were not really 'unintentional accidents'. He had just thought that someone would cover him as someone once had. He had just imagined in the heat of the battle, a sharpshooter by his side supporting him from behind and fighting along his side. The openings were for that sharpshooter to use. Wu Xuefeng, having fought alongside those two for so long, would realize and force himself to remember that the person they both thought about wasn't there and fill them instead. Their teamwork was impeccable. How Wu Xuefeng sometimes read Ye Xiu's mind however was by thinking about what Su Muqiu would do.

The mistakes in game got fewer as time passed and the competition grew more intense.

In front of Su Mucheng, the mistakes made outside of the game were almost nonexistent.

But otherwise, they were still there. A hole in his heart, a hole in his thoughts. Excellent Era worked hard to cover him and fill it.

"I really didn't know you like hugs so much." Ye Xiu said with betrayal and emotion when Yin Xiong abruptly hugged him after a game and everyone seemed to take that as the signal for a group hug.

"Captain, I get lonely too." Yin Xiong solemnly said.

Qin Tianran backed him up. "It's because you used to say No Clerics. Look what you did to Yin Xiong! Make it up to him."

"If you can get traumatized so easily, become a DPS!"

Outside of Excellent Era, hardly anyone ever noticed. But there was a few.

"How is he?" Wei Chen asked them after Ye Xiu left the room to check out the training camp that Wei Chen had bragged about and used to distract him. Excellent Era was pleasantly surprised that someone had cared enough to notice. As much as they covered for their captain and doted on him, a small part of them did want their competitors to know just how amazing their captain was, how amazing he was for being able to do all that he was doing with even the circumstances. A part of them also wanted more to care.

"Better." Wu Xuefeng answered.

Wei Chen eased a little and mumbled, "It really is a pity that guy can't join... Good for us," He said because he didn't like to be sappy and didn't want to think about an already powerful team having an even more powerful addition to give them all a hard time, but he admitted, "but a real pity."

"Yeah." That was all that they could say on that. As much as they wanted to, they couldn't change the past. All they could do was continue their paths and strive for the future as best as they can with what they had.

They all weren't really people who liked to dwell on negative emotions so after a little silence, Qin Tianran forced a laugh.

"Is it really okay to give him access to your training camp? I bet a lot of your kids are going to be kidnapped."

Wei Chen swore a storm and rushed out of the room. "Damn it! Ye Qiu, you better not poach my kids!"

They all laughed and followed.

Within Excellent Era, there was a person that hadn't noticed. Because he wasn't there at the beginning and then wasn't there almost the entire time.

After the championship celebration was done, after a few short happy days as they got Xue Mingkai their runaway teammate integrated with the team and welcomed back and scolded for being absent except in name almost the entire season, the team minus Ye Xiu ganged up on Xue Mingkai in an empty room.

Xue Mingkai looked nervous. "Um. You're still mad about me, aren't you?"

They were. This guy caused so much stress and gave so much unnecessary work to their little captain! Their captain may have done it and still looked so indomitable and fearless all the while, but they all knew that for him to get them this far took a lot of research, consideration, and hard work!

At least this guy wasn't too shameless to not realize it.

But that wasn't the point.

"Xue Miiing kai," Qin Tianran eerily said, making Xue Mingkai shrink against the wall, "Now that you are planning to finally stay with us - you are, aren't you?"

"Yes!! I promise I won't leave anymore!" Xue Mingkai shouted, nearly saluted and pleaded.

"Good." Wu Xuefeng said from his other side and Xue Mingkai didn't know that gentle vice captain could look so scary.

"Good." Qin Tianran vehemently echoed and Xue Mingkai nearly cried. He was not ashamed to admit that he jolted with fright when he felt Qin Tianran grip his shoulders like his hands were eagle's claws. "Then. Now that you are planning to finally stay with us, you need to know what you can *not* do or say."

"Huh?"

"Captain!!" Xue Mingkai shouted and bowed to Ye Xiu, who was utterly confused by his sudden action. Ye Xiu continued absently blowing on his cup of steaming hot tea. "I'm so sorry for leaving! I promise I will never miss a match again!"

"Okay..." Ye Xiu said slowly, "I already knew that, but uh, thanks." Ye Xiu still looked bewildered by the intensity of his apology and declaration. Did he ever give reason to the other that he distrusted his last promise?

Xue Mingkai was touched and shouted his promise again. He then went to the training room with the others. Ye Xiu watched him go quietly with a slow blink, but he smiled. The team was complete and next season would be a lot smoother.

When Xue Mingkai heard his teammates' ground rules to never point out or laugh at his captain's absentmindedness in the event that it appears, never ask about the third instant noodles or extra plate he sometimes made, never ask about the group hugs and movie nights and sleep overs, among many other things, and then heard the reason why, he felt extremely bad that he took so long to finally get over himself and join the team he had supposedly officially joined ages ago.

He wasn't the only one who was struggling with something.

There was another who had and, despite everything and all that he had to do, he still supported him and waited for him to come back. Season 1 ended alright and they got the championship, but Xue Mingkai swore that this would never happen again.

He promised this time he was the one that would have his little captain's back. He would support his captain and make up for his year of selfishness.

Together, Excellent Era for the championship!

And with that Season 1 ended.

What many people outside of a few Season 1 pro players did not know was that in Season 1, Ye Xiu hadn't been the most powerful or domineering.

On the battlefield, he may have been. May have seemed so strong and independent and collected. The rightful commander of his squad, the sturdy captain of his team, the kid genius who needed no one...

But outside of Glory, he wasn't as strong or stable as his battle mage skills and operation suggested.

Because in Season 1, the Ye Xiu of then had been a young boy who had just lost his best friend, someone he had lived in the same bed with for three years. The Ye Xiu of then had just became a young adult who was abruptly made the sole guardian of a grieving little girl and a captain responsible for a new team in a new industry. A team of older strangers entrusted their future three years with him, a boss bet his life savings on the team they just created, and at the same time, they had already lost a member, his best partner who was supposed to walk every step of the way with him.

They got a new member, but that member was only there in name, had ran off and was not willing yet to fully come back.

These were the things that made Ye Xiu of Season 1.

He still did it. Worked hard at being there for Mucheng. Worked hard to set up and establish the new team. Worked harder to train the team and lead them to victory. Worked hard to support their new member and wait for his return.

He did it and for that, everyone who knew him back then would have confessed his name as the most amazing person they had ever known.

But if you asked Ye Xiu about who he thought were amazing, it would definitely be that first Excellent Era that had been with him each step of the way. Other people like Wei Chen would laugh at how Excellent Era doted on Ye Xiu and spoiled him like a team of mothers, but Ye Xiu would always profess that he couldn't have done anything without them. He never really knew how much they knew, even how much they did, some things really a blur in that year half-fogged by the phantom memory of his late friend, but he was grateful whenever they appeared in his life, a quiet companion, a quiet support, a lively family that waited on him and helped him stand.

People would never know how much Team Excellent Era did for him, only seeing his brilliant glory and saying that the era was his, but Ye Xiu knew and to him, the era was Excellent Era's and all the glory was to Excellent Era.

The glory of the first three seasons were Team Excellent Era's.

They were his family who took care of him, his team that had covered for him time and time again without ever mentioning a word.

He was most grateful in those three years of his life.

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